

older, you are less useful? Participants were interviewed six times over the 20 years of the project.

The 660 individuals included in our analyses were matched to survival information that we acquired from the National Death Index.

As can be seen in the chart, we found that those who expressed a more positive self-perception of aging had a mean survival advantage of 7.5 years over those who expressed a more negative self-perception of aging. That is, when we looked at the amount of time it took half of the people in each group to die, the difference between the two groups was seven-and-a-half years.

The strength of our finding is demonstrated by those in the more positive self-perception of aging group having better survival than those in the more negative self-perception of aging group among men as well as women, among those with better as well as worse functional health, and among those with lower as well as higher education.

When we adjusted for a number of variables at baseline, including age and functional health, we found that those in the positive self-perception of aging group still tended to have a significant survival advantage over those in the negative self-perception of aging group.

We also examined a mechanism by which this process occurred. More negative self-perceptions of aging predicted reduced will to live, which, in turn tended to contribute to a shorter life span. In other words, those with more negative self-perceptions of aging were more likely to consider their lives to be “worthless,” “empty,” and “hopeless.” Whereas those with more positive self-perceptions of aging were more likely to select the opposite terms of “worthy,” “full,” and “hopeful.”

In closing, I should note that although the prevalence of negative images of aging is not entirely due to the media and marketing, they seem to be the sources that are the most pervasive, identifiable, systematic, and profit-driven. Extolling youthfulness while demeaning the old helps to generate images that, as our research suggests, may have devastating consequences.

Thank you.